

Eyes and Ears

ONE-OFFICER POSTS SPREAD TRANSFORMATIONAL DIPLOMACY THROUGHOUT FRANCE **BY THOMAS J. WHITE**

While “transformational diplomacy” and “American Presence Post” may be relatively recent additions to most diplomatic lexicons, the APP concept has been alive and well in France since 1999. The U.S. Mission to France created the first APPs more than seven years ago, and the five in France represent the most successful experience with the model to date.

The mission hosts American Presence Posts in Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Rennes and Toulouse, in addition to two traditional consulates general in Marseilles and Strasbourg. These posts provide an important frontline capability in the mission’s transformational diplomacy agenda throughout France.

The rationale creating APPs in France was straightforward. Like other Western European countries, France witnessed the closure in the 1980s and 1990s of many long-established consulates. Closure rates increased in the late 1990s with the need to find resources to staff new embassies in the former Soviet republics.

Then-Ambassador Felix Rohatyn and his country team saw that the United States was losing its eyes and ears in important regional centers in France. With France’s global diplomatic and military presence and its status as the world’s fifth largest economy, cultivating favorable French atti-

tudes toward American people, policies and products is especially important. The U.S. Mission in France resolved to correct this situation by creating the American Presence Post concept, reestablishing an on-the-ground presence throughout the country using existing embassy positions and resources.

Each APP is staffed with one mid-level Foreign Service officer, supported by one to four Locally Engaged Staff. The agenda is focused: public diplomacy, commercial advocacy and essential American citizen

services. The APPs have proven to be an effective way to bring America’s message to the French people, through close contacts with the regional press, speeches and seminars with local educational institutions and outreach to specialized groups, including France’s substantial Muslim community.

APP Bordeaux

Consul J. Brinton Rowdybush

U.S. consular activities originated in Bordeaux in 1790, making it the first per-



APP Bordeaux Consul J. Brinton Rowdybush speaks to high school students at the College Jean Lartaut Jarnac.

manent consular post in the world for the young United States. In 1995, the consulate was closed for budgetary reasons. In 2000, Bordeaux was reopened as an APP. Today, its district covers the three southwestern regions of Aquitaine, Poitou-Charentes and the Limousin. Although Bordeaux is known worldwide for its wine, the region is also a major player in aeronautics, lasers, pharmaceuticals and wood. Its eight universities enroll 125,000 students. The University of California has had an active exchange program based in Bordeaux for more than 40 years. The United States is the leading foreign investor in Aquitaine, as well as the primary supplier and customer of the region.

APP Lille

Consul Jeffrey Hawkins

APP Lille's district covers the north of France, from the outskirts of Paris to the Belgian border. Lille sits on a major European crossroads and is roughly equidistant from Paris, Brussels and London. Other major centers include the ports of Calais and Dunkerque and historic Amiens. Long dependent on smokestack industries like textiles, steel and mining, the region passed through a difficult period of retrenchment in the 1980s and 1990s. The region now seeks to turn its central location close to 300 million of Europe's most prosperous consumers into an engine for economic renewal. A key focus is providing support to U.S. business. APP Lille supplements its thin staff with strong support from the embassy in designing public diplomacy programs targeting the region's large university population, vibrant regional media and active cultural institutions.



APP Lyon

Consul Angie Bryan

France's second-largest metropolitan area Lyon is both France's culinary capital and the historical capital of the French silk industry. Lyon hosts several national trade shows and is Interpol's world headquarters. The largest and oldest APP (like Bordeaux, a former consulate general), APP Lyon covers much of central and eastern France, including Chamonix, Clermont-Ferrand, Grenoble, Dijon and Saint-Etienne. Ties to the United States are extensive: 14 friendship associations, 15 sister-city relationships, Tufts University's European campus, an American Club and France's second-highest concentration of American businesses. With Lyon's pharmaceutical and biotech industry and Grenoble's high-tech cluster of enterprises and research institutions, the region is one of France's most dynamic.

APP Rennes

Consul Virginia Murray

The APP Rennes district—western France, including Brittany, Normandy and much of the Loire—is familiar ground to American travelers. The older generation retains an emotional bond with the U.S. because of the allies' role in liberating the area during World War II. The challenge is to connect with the younger generation. APP Rennes has created an active outreach program, targeting small-town grammar schools and big-city universities, to encourage students to study English and pursue advanced degrees in the United States. An active public diplomacy outreach program addresses issues from Mideast policy to U.S. environmental efforts. APP

Rennes is responsible for one of the biggest commercial success stories emerging from France in recent years: General Electric this year signed a \$200 million contract to supply propulsion systems to a French-Italian naval frigate program, thanks in large part to the liaison work of the post's commercial assistant.

APP Toulouse

Consul Jennifer Bachus-Carleton

The APP district covers the Midi-Pyrenees region, the largest in France, roughly the size of Belgium and the Netherlands combined. Best known as the home of Airbus, Toulouse is one of the leading European cities for aerospace and aviation, and the final assembly point for



Above: Lyon Consul Angie Bryan, second from right, attends the 100th anniversary of the town of Roybon's own Statue of Liberty. To her right is Andre Vallini, vice president of the French American Friendship Group in the National Assembly. Raybon Mayor Marcel Bachasson is third from left. Left: U.S. Ambassador Craig Stapleton, center, poses at Ecole Centrale de Lille with French students bound for a semester at the University of Texas at Austin.

Airbus aircraft. The city also is one of the fastest-growing centers in France for biotech research and boasts a strong electronics industry. With more than 110,000 students enrolled at three public universities and 14 graduate engineering and business schools, Toulouse ranks second only to Paris as an academic center in France. ■

The author is minister-counselor for economic affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Paris and coordinator for APP activities in France.